OCCUPATION OF MADAGASCAR IN WORLD WAR 2
OPERATION IRONCLAD

Prior to the landings at Diego Suarez by British and South African Forces in May, 1942 leaflets were dropped by the Royal Air Force in France advising them of the reasons for this. It was the same as the official communication given to the Ambassador of the Vichy Government in Washington on the 4th and 5th May, 1942.

COMMUNICATION OFFICIELLE

du gouvernement des ETATS-UNIS

au sujet de MADAGASCAR

OCCUPATION OF MADAGASCAR IN WORLD WAR 2

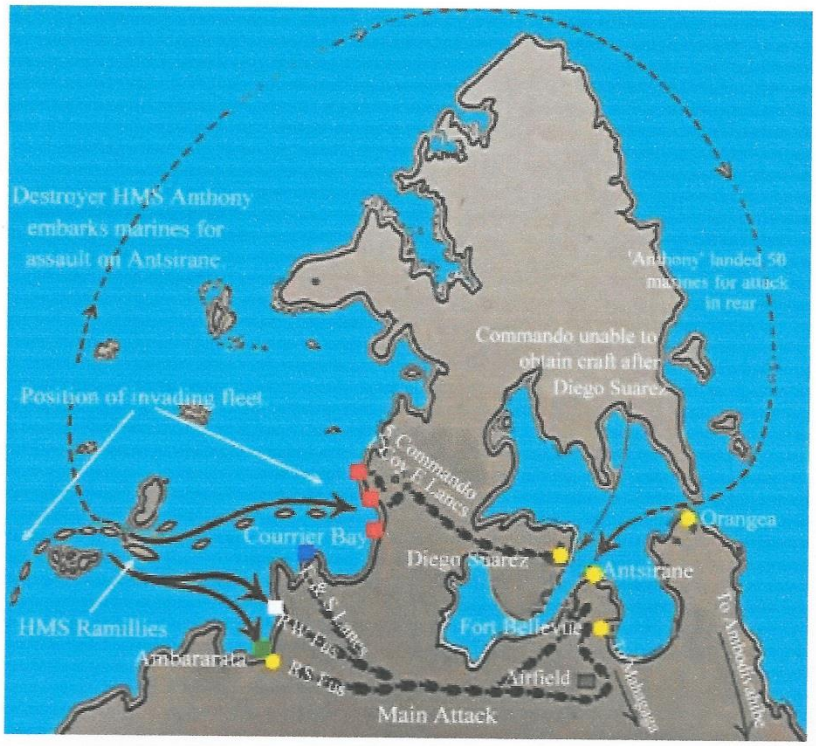
In early 1942 Allied leaders believed that the ports in Madagascar would be used by Japan since their occupation of Burma and most of South East Asia by the end of February, 1942. In March, 1942 the Japanese Navy was moving freely in the Indian Ocean. The British Eastern Fleet had to relocate to a new base at Kilindini, Mombasa in Kenya. As a result this left the Allied supply routes to the British Eighth Army in Egypt open to an all out attack if the northern seaports of Madagascar fell to the Japanese and the result would be catastrophic.
It was decided to launch an amphibious assault on Madagascar, and the plan was known as 'Operation Ironclad'.

Following many reconnaissance missions by the SAAF, the British 5th Infantry Division's 17th Infantry Brigade Group and 13th and 29th Infantry Brigade with 5 Commando, Royal Marines, were carried ashore by landing craft at Courrier Bay and Ambararata Bay just west of the major port of Diego Suarez at the northern tip of the Island on 5th May, 1942. Air cover was provided by aircraft from the Fleet Air Arm and the South African Air Force. Diego Suarez capitulated on 7th May, 1942. Vichy forces withdrew to south to reform. The allies suffered about 500 casualties during this period.

Madagascar Island

OCCUPATION OF MADAGASCAR IN WORLD WAR 2

OPERATION IRONCLAD



Map showing the invasion of Madagascar at Diego Suarez

Cover to Morecombe with East African postmark 'EA APO 53' dated 4th October 1942 and British crown censor 'No 3725'. [redacted] was located at Diego Suarez at the time..

OCCUPATION OF MADAGASCAR IN WORLD WAR 2

On 22nd June, 1942, 22 (EA) Brigade (1/1Kings African Rifles, 5 Kings African Rifles and 1/6 Kings African Rifles) arrived in Madagascar. The South African 7th Motorised Brigade and Rhodesian 27th Infantry Brigade landed during the following weeks.

South African APO 51 was opened on the 26th June, 1942 at Sakaramy village 15 miles from the port of Antsirane. by Capt G F Green and 15 other ranks. They had departed from Durban on 15th June, 1942 and disembarked at Diego Suarez 10 days later.

The first Air Mail to South Africa left on a Military aircraft on the 30th June, 1942 and this service continued at approximately fortnightly intervals during July and August. There was no direct service from South Africa and Official Mail was conveyed by a shuttle service from Pretoria to Nairobi. Private mail was flown by BOAC Flying Boat from Durban to Mombasa and long delays were experienced. On the 6th October a return service was inaugurated by military aircraft between Mombasa and Diego Suarez thus considerably reducing the transit time.

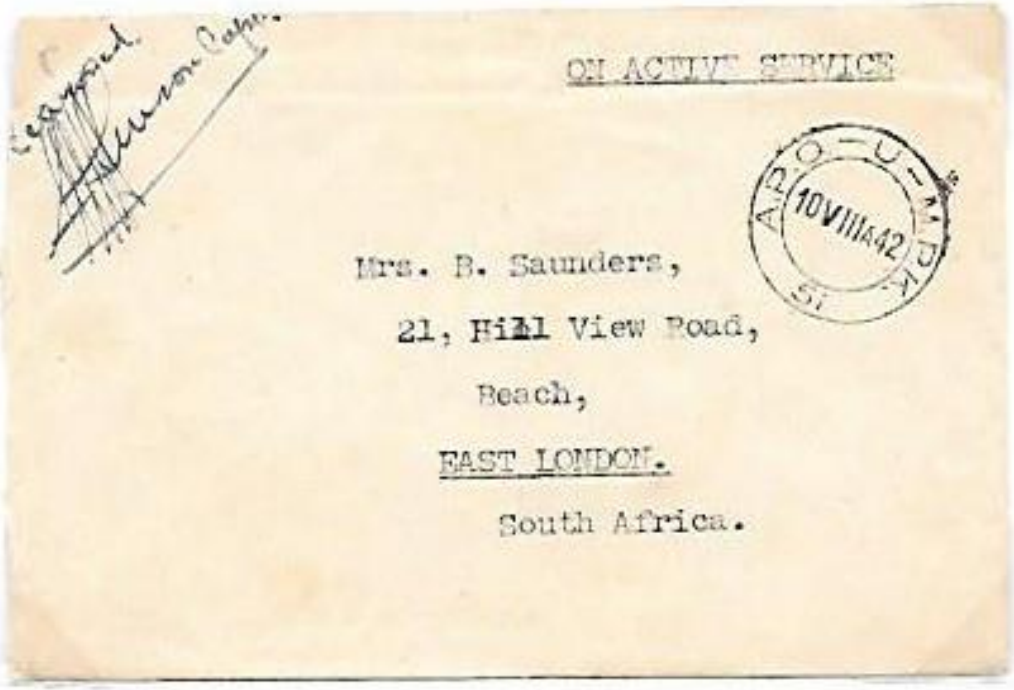
Postmark: A.P.O. U. 51, 7th July, 1942.
This was in use from 26th June, 1942 until 5th August, 1942 and was replaced by a standard 'A.P.O. –U- M.P.K. 51'. It is presumed that this hand stamp was produced at short notice and 'M.P.K.' omitted in error.

Censor: EA 2c No 167. Self censored by Capt Gray.

OCCUPATION OF MADAGASCAR IN WORLD WAR 2

The new hand stamp with the correct inscription was introduced on 10th August, 1942 and in use until 16th November, 1942.

The 7th S A Brigade and the postal unit left the area around Diego Suarez on the 3rd December, 1942 and arrived back in Durban on the 17th December, 1942.



Postmark: A.P.O. – U - M.P.K. 51, 10th August, 1942. (Earliest recorded date).
Censor: Hand written 'Censored' by a Captain, possibly self censored.

Postmark: A.P.O. – U - M.P.K. 51, 16th November, 1942. (Latest recorded date).
Censor: Type EA 4A, EA. No I/160

THE OCCUPATION OF MADAGASCAR IN WORLD WAR 2
OPERATION IRONCLAD

A base Post Office was opened at Diego Suarez on 6th August, 1942 and remained in operation there until 22nd September, 1945. Hand stamp EA APO 53 was allocated to Diego Suarez.

From May 1942 air mails were sent by military plane to Mombasa and thence by BOAC flying boat to Durban. The air service was suspended between 8th July and 13th July, 1942.
In September 1942 the Nairobi – Mombasa- Lindi – Diego Suarez route was operated by Hudson aircraft and was extended to include Ivato in November. BOAC started a weekly service from 25th January, 1943 Kisumu – Mombasa - Lindi – Diego Suarez.

Postal rates were 1/3 or equivalent by air and under 2oz free surface mail.

Location: Diego Suarez.

Postmark: EA APO 53, dated 16th November, 1942.
Redirected at Lusaka 19th November, 1942.

Censor: Type EA 4A No I/143 Possibly self censored

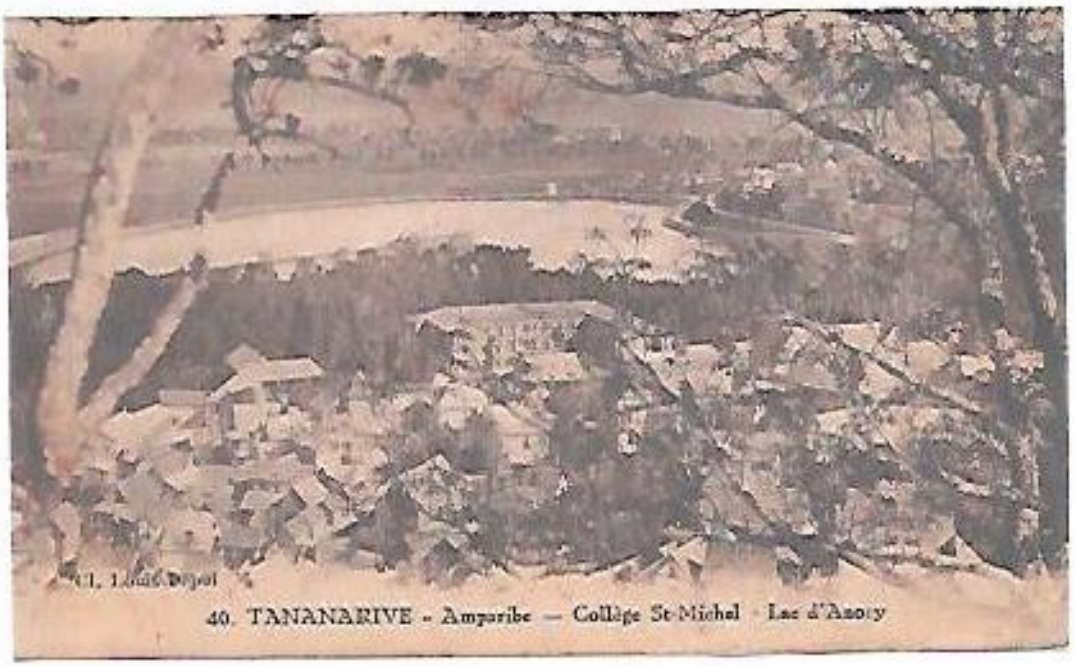
Postage: Free 'On Active Service'.

BRITISH TROOPS IN MADAGASCAR IN WORLD WAR 2

During the Allied invasion of Madagascar by the British and South African Troops in June 1942 the South African, East African and British Army established Post Offices on the island. The British FPOs allocated were 596 & 597 but only FPO 596 was recorded used for 5 months in 1942.
The East African Offices were EA APO 53, 54 and 59 and were in use until August 1945.
South African Forces Post Office was APO 51 at Sakaramy 15 miles from Antsirane in June 1942 and returned to Durban in December 1942.

Plain cover endorsed 'On Active Service' with 'FPO 596' postmark and Censor '3267' sent to Durham.

Plain cover endorsed 'On Active Service' with 'EA APO 53' postmark dated 4th December 1942 and South African Forces Type EA 4B 'PASSED BY MILITARY CENSOR E.A. No VI/9' censor cachet sent to Morecombe.



View of Tananarive and Lac d'Anory

Picture postcard with 'EA APO 59' postmark dated 24th November, 1942 and indistinct 'Passed by Military Censor' mark sent by a soldier with the 24/26th Field Bty. 9th Field Regt. RA. c/o APO 1810. This postmark was allocated for use at Tananarive from 15th October, 1942 until 15th August, 1943.

THE OCCUPATION OF MADAGASCAR IN WORLD WAR 2

An East African Base Post Office was opened at Diego Suarez on 6th August, 1942 and remained in operation there until 22nd September, 1945. Hand stamp EA APO 53 was allocated to Diego Suarez.

Very poor facilities existed at Antsirane docks for dealing with mail, which had to be manhandled. Bags had to be loaded on to tugs and barges for conveyance to a ship in the bay, and hoisted on board by ropes or carried up a ladder. Incoming mail was cleared on the ships, sorted at Sakaramy, and distributed the same day. Mail for the troops in the south of the island was sent forward by whatever means were available – road, air or ship.

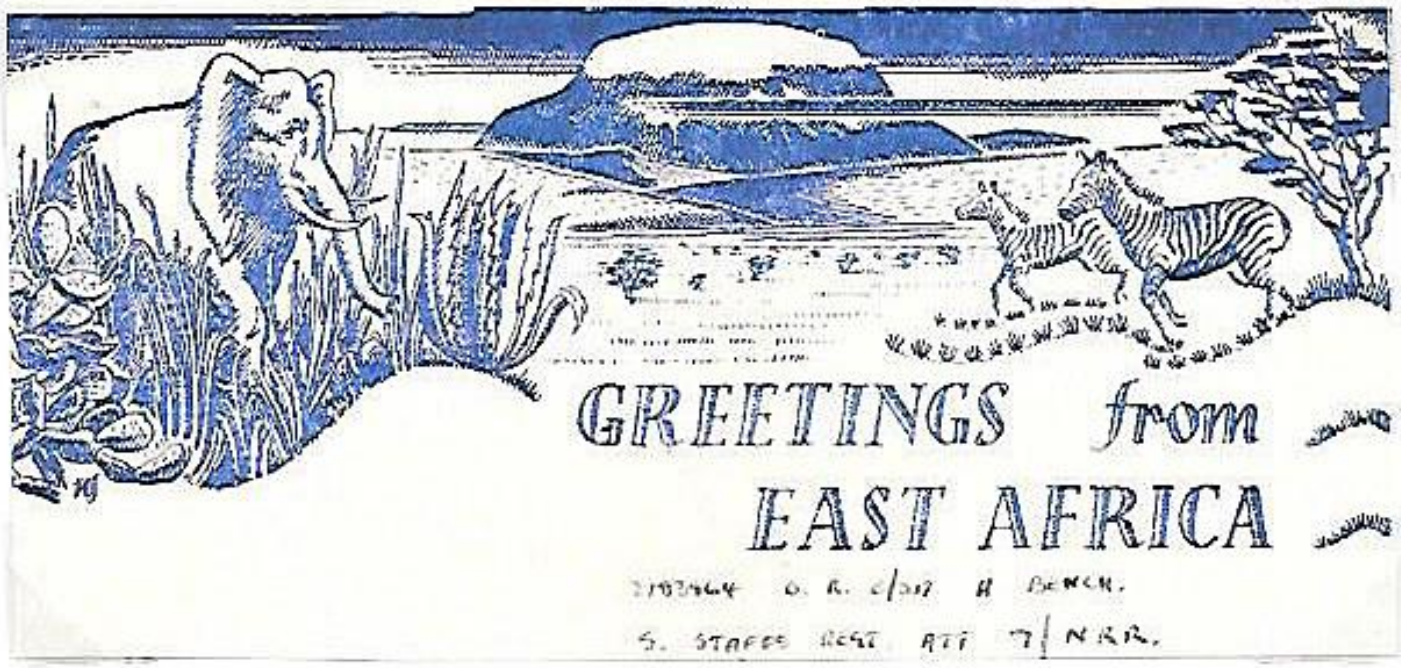
In September 1942 the Nairobi – Mombasa- Lindi – Diego Suarez route was operated by Hudson aircraft and was extended to include Ivato in November. BOAC started a weekly service from 25th January, 1943 Kisumu – Mombasa - Lindi – Diego Suarez.

Postal rates were 1/3 or equivalent by air and under 2oz free by surface mail.

Postmark: EA APO 53, dated 19th August, 1942.
Censor: Type EA 2B No 30. Possibly self censored (Lt Colonel)

OCCUPATION OF MADAGASCAR IN WORLD WAR 2

Christmas Air Letters were introduced in 1942 and in 1943 and 1944 specially printed pictorial Air Letters were produced. The one below was issued in 1944.



Postmark: EA APO 53, 28th October, 1944.
Censor: Type A 600 No 4924, Capt. Kelly.
Sender: C/Sgt Bench, South Staffs Regt, Attached to 7/NRR.

OCCUPATION OF MADAGASCAR IN WORLD WAR 2

The Air Mail Letter Card service began officially on 11th August, 1941 when forms printed by the Southern Rhodesia Survey Unit in Nairobi were issued. The main characteristics of the East African Types are that they have no gummed flaps and are endorsed 'Affix gummed strip here' and 'Do not turn over until censored' There were many different types printed, two of which are shown below.

Postmark EA APO 53 dated 20th February, 1943. Censor Type EA 4A No 1/193

Postmark EA APO 53 dated 4th January, 1944. Censor Type EA 4A No 1/238.

THE OCCUPATION OF MADAGASCAR IN WORLD WAR 2

British Field Post Office 596 was set up at Diego Suarez on the 8th June until 4th September, 1942 before moving to Majunga on the 10th to 26th September, 1942 and finally to the capital Tananarive, in the centre of the island until November, 1942. All British Field Post Offices were replaced by East African Army Post Offices.

FPO 596 dated 22nd June, 1942. Censor Type A504 No. 1592

FPO 596 dated 3rd July, 1942. Censor Type A504 No. 3411

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE IN MADAGASCAR
WORLD WAR 2

3 Air Letters sent by Cpl Carter, RAF Madagascar to his parents in Selly Oak Birmingham. Two covers have the correct 25 cents postage in KUT stamps.

AMLC with postmark EA APO 53 dated 24th November, 1944 and RAF censor R11/137 cachet.

Blue Triangle A L with EA APO 53 postmark dated 31st October, 1944, crown censor 102 and Type EA F3 'Deputy/Chief Field/ Censor/ 7 Nov 1944/ Returned to APO/ 9 Nov 1944' cachets.

AMLC, stamps removed dated 19th December, 1944 with RAF censor R12/137 and Type EA F3 boxed 'Deputy/Chief Field/Censor/3 Jan 1945/Returned to APO' cachets.

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE IN MADAGASCAR
WORLD WAR 2

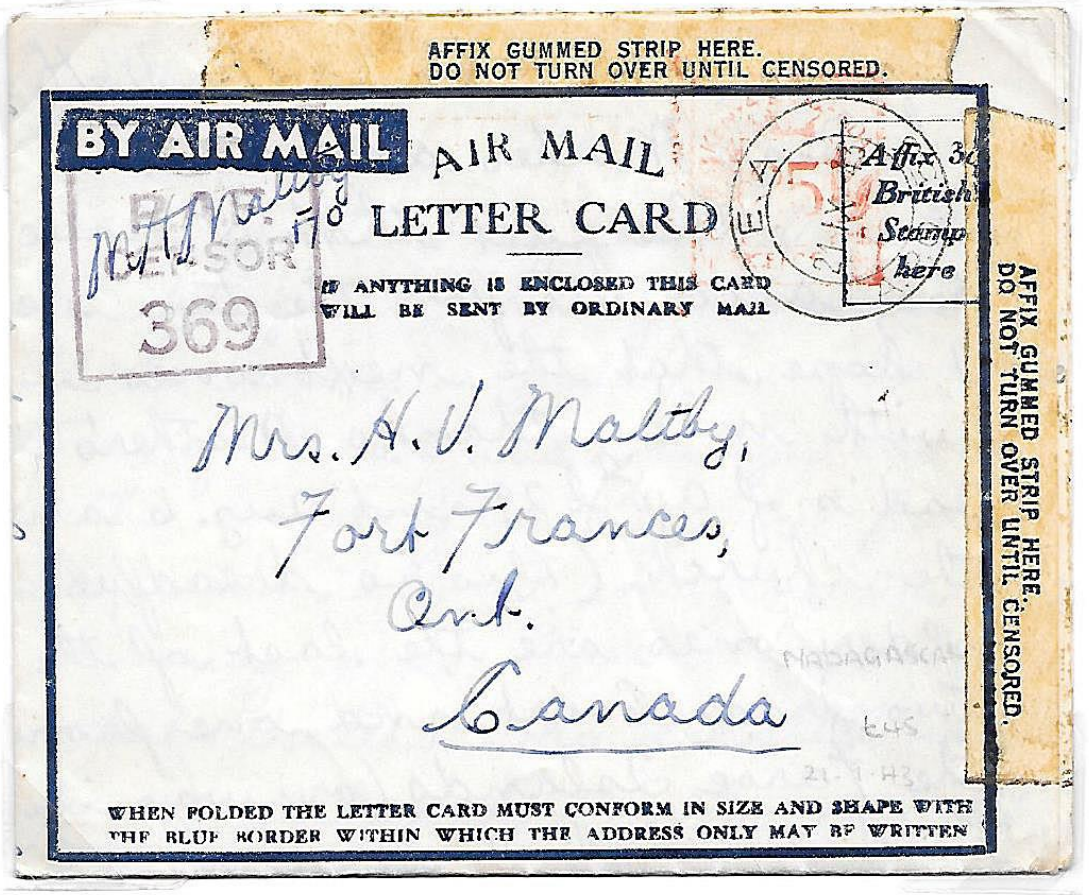
Located: Diego Suarez
265 Squadron

Postmark: EA APO 53 21st September, 1943.
In use 6th April 1943 to 22nd September, 1945.

Censor: RAF R11/369. Self censored.

Postage: Air Mail letter with 25cents pre-printed in red.

Sender: Fg Off Maltby, RCAF.



265 Squadron was formed on 11th March, 1943 at Kipevu with Catalina IB's and moved to Diego Suarez on 1st April, 1943 to patrol the Indian Ocean and Straits of Mozambique to protect convoys against Japanese submarines. The Squadron also had detachments at Jui, Pamanzi, Kipevu, Mauritius, Tulear, Masirah, Port Victoria, Khormaksar, St Lucia and Congella.

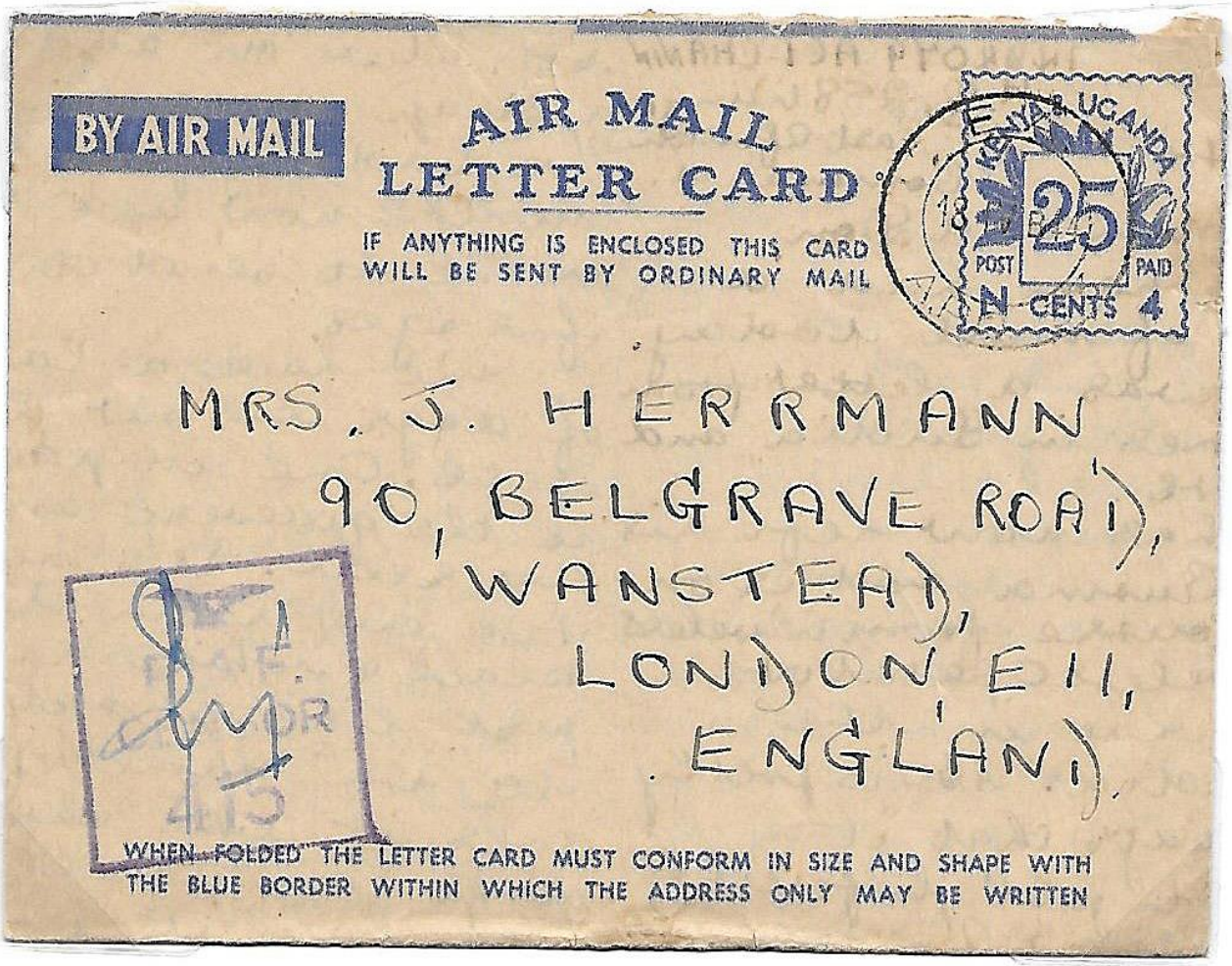
THE ROYAL AIR FORCE IN MADAGASCAR
WORLD WAR 2

Located: Diego Suarez
Headquarters 258 Wing RAF.

Postmark: EA APO 53 18th April, 1944
In use 6th April 1943 to 22nd September, 1945.

Censor: RAF R11/415

Sender: AC1 Chanin



Printed Air Mail Letter Card 25cents prepaid

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE IN MADAGASCAR
WORLD WAR 2

Located: Diego Suarez

Postmark: EA APO 53 10th August, 1944
In use 6th April 1943 to 22nd September, 1945.

Censor: RAF R11/20 with R11/655 most probably a Base Censor.
Neither of these censors are recorded as used in Madagascar by Colley and Garrard.

Transit mark: Alexandra 23 Aug 1944 arrival date stamp.

Stampless OAS cover to Alexandra in Egypt.

The air support for the occupation of Madagascar in 1942 had been provided by aircraft carriers. The few RAF censors recorded from Madagascar are probably related to the flying boat Squadrons on the western shore of the Indian Ocean. 265 Squadron was based at Diego Suarez and 209 and 259 Squadrons had detachments there.

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE IN MADAGASCAR
WORLD WAR 2

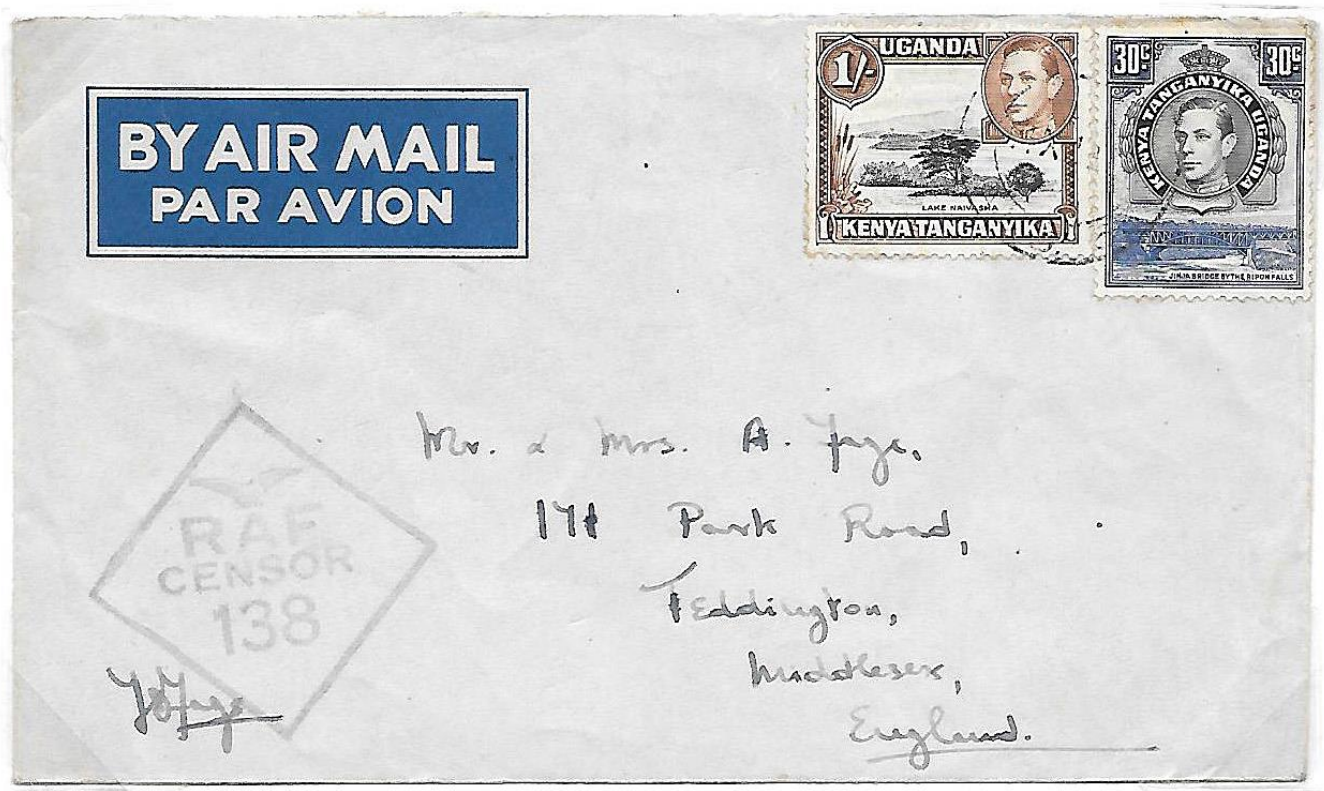
Located: Diego Suarez

Postmark: EA APO 53 6 December, 1944
In use 6th April 1943 to 22nd September, 1945.

Censor: RAF R12/138 self censored

Sender: F E Faye

Postage: Air mail rate 1 shilling 30 cents, KUT stamps.



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THE ROYAL AIR FORCE IN MADAGASCAR
WORLD WAR 2

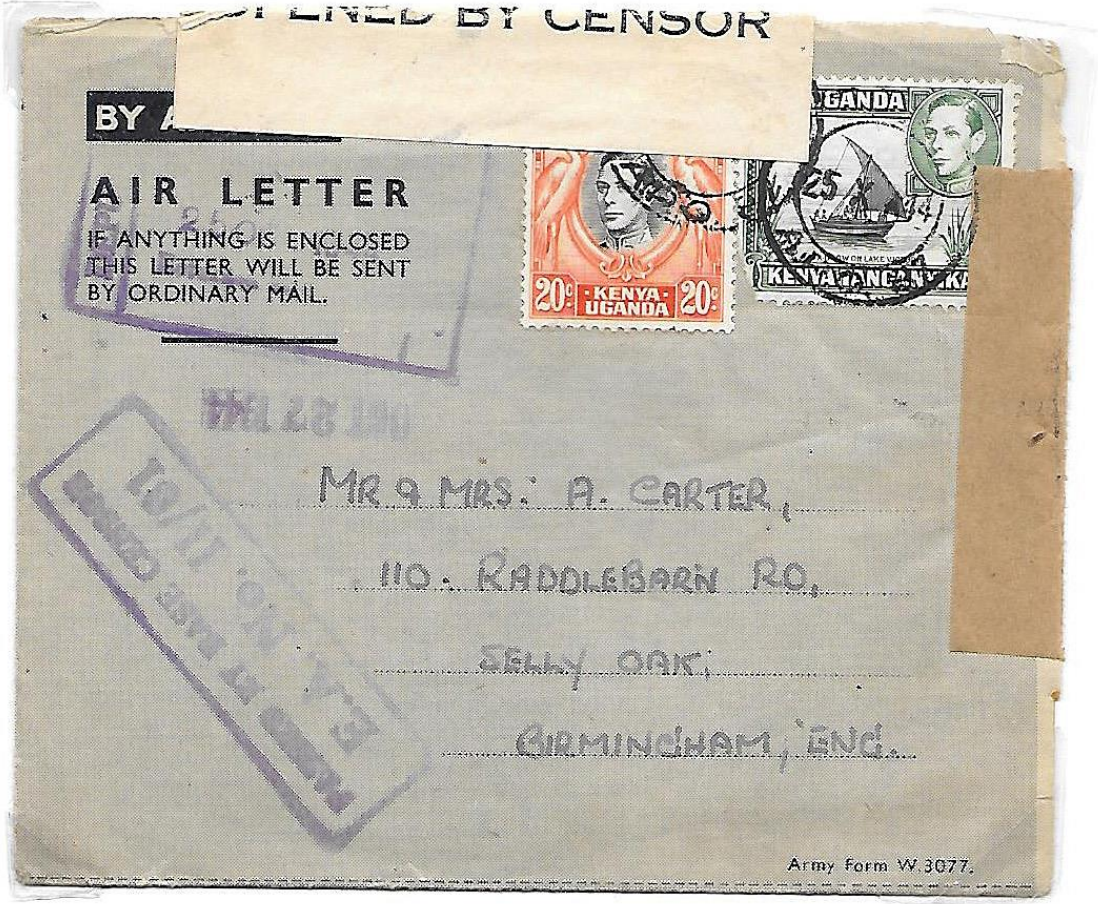
Located: Diego Suarez

Postmark: EA APO 87, 25th October, 1944

Censor: Passed by Base Censor EA APO II/01, sealed with 'Opened by Censor' label and small circle 03 on reverse. It is presumed these were added at Nairobi prior to entering the APO system.

Sender: Cpl Carter, RAF Madagascar to UK.

Postage: 25 cents Air Letter rate.



It would appear that this Air Letter was written by Cpl Carter in Madagascar on 13th October and taken to Nairobi where it entered the East African APO system receiving EA APO 87 on the 25th October, 1944.

THE ROYAL NAVY IN MADAGASCAR

Following the occupation of Madagascar in July 1942 the Royal Navy established a naval base at Diego Suarez in the north of the island. In January, 1945 the base was handed over to the Free French Navy.

Air Mail cover to Surrey with 1/3d postage, this being the correct rate for air mail from Allied Post Offices in Madagascar to the UK. The postmark is the mute 'From HM Base' known used on mail from Diego Suarez for a short time before the French naval post office was opened in late January, 1945.
The sender, Chandon Marcus has given his return address as c/o GPO London, and added 'F M' (Franchise Militaire) being free surface mail, and a French naval 'Marine Nationale Madagascar' cachet has been applied. This cachet has been known on mail from Tananarive where the Free French Navy had an office, and was replaced in May, 1945 with a different cachet 'Marine Madagascar et Reunion'.